

Remarks by Ambassador Teshome Toga to the ALDEPAC Lunch on the current situation in Ethiopia

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Brussels

**Hon. Louis Michel,
Co- president of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly,
Members of the ALDEPAC,
Hon. Netty Baldeh,
Co-President of the ACP-EU JPA,
Hon. Speaker,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Let me begin my remarks by thanking the organisers of the traditional ALDEPAC lunch held on the occasion of the ACP-EU JPA inter-secessional meetings. As a founding member of the group, I bear witness to the significance of our interactions and exchanges in such settings. The work done by the group, no doubt, helped creating understanding and strengthening unity and solidarity among global actors.

In fact, the work of the group needs to be further intensified as we are now facing fast changing global dynamics, full of uncertainties and challenges. Allow me to extend my sincere appreciation to Hon Louis Michel for his leadership not only in the

ALDEPAC but also in the JPA, as well as for his deep understanding of the context of ACP countries.

Let me take this opportunity to inform you about current developments in Ethiopia.

I know all friends and partners, including our ALDEPAC family, were concerned about the recent unrest and protests in the two largest regions of Ethiopia. Given Ethiopia's remarkable achievements to improve all spheres of the life of its people in the last 20 years, witnessing such violent protest took many by surprise. It clearly taught us that in transitional societies like Ethiopia, there are always segments of the society that will be unsatisfied with the government's performance. We learned that we need to redouble our efforts and that there is no place for complacency. With a population of nearly 100 million (60% of which is young), Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, and our development discourse needs further intervention in order to harness the demographic dividend. While we registered unprecedented records in education and overall economic growth, the commensurate job creation did not keep pace with the growth in education. Therefore, as some friends said, “you are victims of your own success”.

I am sure that you have been following measures taken by my government. The President of FDRE, in his State of the nation address pronounced in early October last

year, exposed the reform program to be undertaken. One such measure is reforming our electoral system and electoral law so that minority voices are better heard. Secondly, in order to address grievances related to good governance, a cabinet reshuffle from Federal to district level was successfully carried out.

Since young people were at the forefront of the unrest, ensuring their participation in the political, economic and social discourse of the country was imperative. Consequently, the government created a revolving youth fund of half a billion dollar at federal level and regional states have taken similar measures.

Since the declaration of the state of emergency, the security situation has overall returned to normalcy and business in all parts of the country runs smoothly and without difficulty. The recent peaceful conduct of the AU summit and several state visits can be seen as proof to corroborate that. Let me add that we are well aware that imposing the state of emergency is not a long-term answer to this challenge. It only aimed at creating a conducive atmosphere to address the root of the problem, which is why we have been focusing on addressing public grievances. We are steadfast in undertaking the measures laid down in the reform program introduced by the government. Engagement with the public and with the public services who are at the forefront of delivery services was successfully concluded.

A political dialogue among 22 legally registered political parties has begun. Six rounds of dialogue were held, in which parties have been debating on the modalities, procedures and other issues related to the dialogue. This is a positive and encouraging move. We are open and ready to discuss any issue without any precondition. No issue is a taboo.

However, recognition of the constitution, denouncing armed struggle and resorting to a peaceful competition is the only governing principle for participation. We hope all actors and stakeholders will play their part, in a responsible way, to make it a success. Once the procedural matters are agreed upon, observers will be invited to follow the substantive dialogue and debate. That is clearly a strong political commitment on the part of the government to deepen democracy. Deepening democracy also demands strengthening democratic institutions and a culture of democracy. Working with civil society organisations, political parties, the media and other non-state actors is crucial to our democratisation process. We know that democracy cannot be built on empty stomachs, and therefore advances in the economic and social sectors and overall economic development remains an absolute necessity.

Many friends have enquired whether the state of emergency will be lifted or not. That will be decided by the government after a thorough assessment of the state of peace

and security on the ground. However, 80% of the public felt that more time is needed to consolidate the public consultation.

If the situation does not warrant the continuation of the state of emergency, then we will not maintain it, not even for a day. I wish to make absolutely clear that all fundamental rights have been and will be upheld and that matters of that nature will now be managed by regular legal procedures. Almost 90% of those involved in the violence, except for a few core criminals, who will face the due process of law, have all been released and integrated with the community.

In spite of the challenges we experienced, the economy is showing strong performance due to increased FDI and harvest in agriculture. With increase in our production and productivity, our performance in foreign exchange earnings from exports, however, is below our plan due to global commodity prices. The lesson is very clear: value addition to primary products remains critical. As you are well aware, Argo processing and manufacturing are our focus and priority in the GTP II. Investment in Agro industrial and industrial parks are underway. Finance remains a challenge, in this regard.

Ethiopia does not see its peace, security and development in isolation from that of its neighbours. That is why Ethiopia plays an active role in regional peace and security

by contributing to peacekeeping operations in the region and beyond. It also plays its fair share in hosting one of largest refugee population in the continent while fighting the looming drought in the Horn of Africa. Our commitment to regional integration based on mutual interests remains strong. In this regard, we work very closely with the EU and its member states on strategic issues which are of vital interest to both sides. We believe that members of parliament, as direct representatives of their communities, play an irreplaceable role in forging people to people relations. Therefore, let us make our parliamentary diplomacy more effective and dynamic so it can be in the forefront in addressing the challenges facing our electorates.

I thank you for your kind attention.